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ABSTRACT

Student teaching handbooks from seven state-supported institutions of higher education that offered special education as a major in preservice teacher education programs were studied to determine the extent to which Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) standards for student teaching experiences were incorporated into teacher preparation programs. The institutions were located in Utah, South Dakota, South Carolina, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania and enrolled less than 10,000 full-time undergraduate students. A 5-point Likert scale was used in the evaluation with 5 indicating complete congruence between a CEC standard and a handbook requirement, and 0 indicating no congruence between the two. There was little congruence between the handbooks and the CEC standards, with only one standard in the handbooks, length of the student teaching experience, awarded a mean score higher than 3. The handbooks were awarded mean scores between 2 and 3 on four CEC standards that generally dealt with the structure of the student teaching experience. On five standards concerning the objectives of a student teaching experience, the handbooks were awarded scores between 1 and 2. Mean scores between 0 and 1 were awarded to the handbooks on five standards that addressed the qualifications of the professionals involved, the quality of the sites, and the placement of student teachers in the sites. Only two of the handbooks were written specifically for student teaching in special education. Appendices include CEC standards for clinical experiences and a demographic questionnaire completed by the special education programs. Contains 11 references. (TD)

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THE REFLECTION OF CEC STANDARDS INCLUDED IN STUDENT TEACHING HANDBOOKS: A PILOT STUDY

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High-quality practicum experiences are an essential part of any effective professional preparation program. It is through practicum experiences that students preparing for future professional roles practice and demonstrate the skills they must have to be effective educators. In an effort to provide consistency to these experiences, professional organizations have developed standards that should be incorporated into the practical experiences for student teachers. The Council for Exceptional Children has developed specific standards for the certification of special educators and the accreditation of those programs which prepare them (CEC, 1996)(See Appendix A) An institution of higher education (IHE) seeking approval for its special education programs must submit the necessary information to CEC for review. In order for an IHE to receive program approval from CEC, these standards must be incorporated into its teacher education program (CEC, 1996).The CEC standards are designed to establish a common set of professional expectations for all preparation programs in the profession. These standards were developed over a six-year period and involved thousands of special educators (CEC.1996). The standards focus on the quality components of a program rather than on a specific model. High quality programs are built on the talents of the faculty, students, and other professionals in the community. The practitioners have the responsibility to teach the continually emerging knowledge derived from research and practice. These requirements provide guidelines that structure the preparation of preservice professionals in this field. Hence, the requirements help to ensure the quality of such programs of preparation (CITE).

Important to the preparation of preservice special educators are practicum experiences in which preservice teachers are given opportunities to be exposed to "model inservice professionals who use practices congruent with the knowledge and skills expected of the student candidate" (CEC, 1996). Of these practicum experiences, it is a common belief that student teaching is the most influential in preservice teacher education (Raidl, 1994).

Whether preservice special educators are being adequately prepared for their roles is an important question. It was the belief of the authors of the present study that an important step in answering this question would be to investigate the nature and quality of student teaching experiences that are being provided preservice special educators by colleges and universities. Because student teaching experiences are structured by the policies and procedures published in student teaching handbooks, the authors concluded that an examination of a sample of such handbooks would provide a way of assessing the quality of these experiences. Therefore, the intent of this study was to determine how closely a small pilot sample of college and university student teaching handbooks for special education concurred with the national standards endorsed by CEC.

Methods

Although the authors of this study received a small grant to conduct the research being reported in this paper, the grand did not bring with it enough money to conduct a large-scale study involving a broad nationwide sample of special education preparation programs. Therefore, the examiners decided to do a pilot study in which the student teaching handbooks of a relatively small sample of teacher preparation programs would be examined. The purpose of this study was to investigate the extent to which CEC standards for the student teaching experiences are incorporated into the student teaching handbooks of teacher preparation programs.

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The selection of the IHEs for this study was based on several criteria. To be included, an IHE had to be a public, state-supported institution, its total enrollment of full-time students had to be less than 10.000, and it had to offer special education as a major to students in its preservice teacher education programs. Using Peterson's Guide (19898), a cover letter was sent to 17 institutions explaining the nature of the study and requesting that each institution send a copy of its student teaching handbook. The researchers included a form asking for specific demographic information about the institution's special education program (See Appendix B).

Of the 17 requests, only ten institutions responded and only eight returned a sample of their student teaching handbook. The investigators examined seven of those handbooks because one was written as a graduate level program. The researchers made a follow-up contact both by letter and by phone, but no other institutions responded.

The examiners analyzed each of the seven handbooks for its congruence with the CEC standards for practicum experiences. Three raters independently evaluated each handbook. A five-point Likert scale was used in the evaluation process in which 5 indicated a complete congruence between a CEC standard and a student teaching handbook requirement, while a score of 0 indicated a total absence of congruence between the two. The result was a group consensus for each of the 15 standards on each of the seven handbooks. Following this process, the total number of cumulative quality points awarded for each standard was summed across raters and institutions and from this result a mean score was derived for the handbooks on each standard. The possible mean score for each standard ranged from 0 to 5. To be considered even minimally congruent with a CEC standard, the research team determined that it would be necessary for the handbooks to be awarded a mean score of cumulative quality points of 3 or above on any given standard.

All of the data in this study were derived from a pilot study of a small group of institutions. Each of the institutions involved represented a self-selected population based on a voluntary choice to participate. The overall response rate from the target population was 41%. When considered together, all of these facts represent a selection bias present in this study. The threat to external validity of a study that is posed by such a bias is well documented (Campbell & Stanley, 1963). It is important to be mindful of this limitation of the present study in order to avoid over generalizing its results. It represents a sample of teacher preparation programs across a diverse geographical area (Utah, South Dakota, South Carolina, Nebraska, and Pennsylvania) and it offers some insight into what may be some common and widespread weaknesses regarding the student teaching experiences of preservice special educators. In addition, by pointing the way for further study in this area, its long term results may be that it will lead to significant improvements in the preparation of professional special education personnel.

Results

The investigators who conducted this study carefully selected the institutions in terms of their being public rather than private institutions, in terms of their relative student enrollments, and in terms of the academic programs that they offer to students. Further, the authors required that each be a state-supported institution. Each institution involved in this study enrolls no more than 10,000 full-time students in ins undergraduate programs. Finally, each institution that participated offers special education as a major to students in its preservice teacher education programs. Table 1 provides demographic information on the nature of the special education programs of the institutions involved in this study.

Table 1

IHE	CEC accredited	# of Majors	Graduates	Single major	Double Major	Categorical	Noncategorical	Supervision
1	N0	60	60	NO	YES *El Ed. Sp. Ed*	NO	YES LD, E/BD ID,At Risk	Professors
2	YES	50	15	YES	NO	NO	YES All areas	Professors
3	YES	50	15	NO	YES *El Ed Sp Ed*	NO	YES *MR,LD,E/BD*	Professors
4	YES	105	25	YES	NO	NO	YES Mental/Physical	Professors
5	NO	80	20	YES	YES *El Ed/Sp Ed* *SEED,Sp Ed*	YES	YES *MR,LD,BD*	Professors Adjunct Graduate Interns
6	YES	316	70	?	Pending *El Ed /Sp Ed*	NO	YES MR,LD SBD,PH	Professors
7	YES	160	25	YES	Optional	NO	YES *MR,LD* *BD,OH*	Professors

The analysis of the student teaching handbooks of the seven teacher preparation programs represented in this study resulted in an overall assessment of the student teaching experiences for special education preservice professionals across these seven programs. Using the context of the CEC standards for student teaching experiences, this cumulative qualitative evaluation revealed that there is relatively little congruence between the student teaching handbooks of these programs and the CEC standards.

The total number of cumulative quality points, summer across raters and schools, that could have been awarded to the handbooks for each CEC standard ranged from 0 to 5. Of the fifteen CEC standards, the handbooks from the seven programs involved in this study were awarded a mean score higher than three on only of (Standard 11: length of the student teaching experience). The handbooks were awarded a mean score higher than two but lower than three on four of the CEC standards (Standard 1: experiences are sequential in difficulty; Standard 4: guidelines are offered to structure field experiences; Standard 10: performance criteria are established for student teaching; and Standard 13: students are supervised under a structured program of advisement). The handbooks were awarded a mean score higher than one but lower than two on five of the CEC standards (Standard 2: clearly stated, measurable objectives; Standard 3: model professionals are involved whose practice is congruent with the expectations of the student teacher; Standard 9: student teachers are observed by a university supervisor at least 5 times; Standard 12: expectations of student teachers reflect recommended practices; and Standard 15: there are written criteria for the selection and retention of cooperating and supervising professionals). On the five remaining CEC standards, the handbooks were awarded a mean score of less than one (Standard 5: student teachers are placed with appropriately licensed cooperating teachers; Standard 8: university supervisors have appropriate education and experience in special education; and Standard 14: special education faculty are responsible for the assignments of student teachers to approved placements). Table 2 provides the results of the assessments made of the student teaching handbooks by the raters in this study.

Table 2

Mean Scores for Each Standard

Standard	Mean
11. Students have a minimum of 10 full-time weeks of supervised student teaching in the areas of specialization for which the candidate is being prepared	3.476
1. Experiences are sequential in difficulty	2.769
10. Explicit performance criteria are established for student teaching and each field experience	2.571
13. Practicum experiences are supervised under a structured program of advisement	2.238
4. Cooperating professionals are provided guidelines that structure field experiences	2.190
2. Each experience has clearly (a) stated objectives, and measurable objectives that relate to the overall goals and objectives of the program	1.810
12. Knowledge and skills required for each practicum experience reflect "recommended practice"	1.714
15. There are written criteria for the selection and retention of cooperating professionals and	1.524
9. During student teaching, the supervisor form the college/university observes the candidate at least 5 times	1.236
3. Experiences involve model professionals who use practices congruent with the knowledge and skills expected of the student candidate	1.000
7. Candidates are placed only with cooperating professionals who are appropriate licensed/certified in the specialization in which the candidates are seeking certification	.952
6. The student teaching experience is with the same type of individuals as those with whom the student candidate is seeking licensure/certification	.429
5. The student teaching experience is in the same setting as that for which the student candidate is seeking licensure/ certification	.429
7. Each area of specialization provides supervision to candidates by university/college faculty qualified and experienced in teaching in the area of specialization	.384
14. The special education faculty has responsibility for assigning candidates to approved placements. This responsibility includes the approval of cooperating teachers and supervisors	.143

In addition to the relatively low evaluations made of the student teaching handbooks in relation to their congruence with CEC standards, it was noted that only two of the seven were written specifically for student teaching in special education. The other five handbooks contained no provisions specifically relevant to the needs of preservice special educators. Lastly, while all of the handbooks contained sample forms for the evaluation of he performance of student teachers, only two of those forms were for student teachers in special education. The other five forms omitted various items necessary to evaluate important responsibilities of student teachers in special education.

Discussion

To be considered even minimally congruent with a CEC standard, it was necessary for the handbooks to be awarded a mean score of 3 or above on any given standard. The handbooks were awarded a mean score of cumulative quality points of 3 or above on only Standard 11 (length of student teaching experience). Even though the mean score awarded the handbooks on standard 11 was the highest for all the standards (3.476), this result is itself problematic in relation to the quality of the handbooks. That mean scores are derived from a group of scores, and that this mean score was below the maximum possible score of 5, implies that some of the handbooks did not meet this standard. In fact, two of the handbooks either made no mention of the length of time required for the student teaching experience, or the time was less than 10 full-time weeks of supervised student teaching. Given the importance of time to student learning (Berliner, 1988; Walberg, 1988), and given that handbooks structure the student teaching experience, this finding is cause for some concern regarding the adequacy of preparation programs for special educators.

The handbooks were awarded mean scores of higher than two, but lower than three, on four CEC standards. Such scores are interpreted to mean that there is only a weak congruence between these four standards and the content of the student teaching handbooks. As a group, these four standards deal primarily with the structure of the student teaching experience. In order to support the developmental

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nature of the learning which occurs in this experience, it is important that there be some sequential order of difficulty established within it (Standard 1: X = 2.769). If the student teacher is to achieve the expected outcomes of the experience, then those outcomes must be made explicit for both the student teacher and his or her supervisors (Standard 10: X = 2.571). lastly, in order to maintain the integrity of the student teaching experience, it is necessary to ensure a structured program of advisement throughout the experience (Standard 13 X = 2.338), and the cooperating professionals must be provided with explicit guidelines for their roles and responsibilities (Standard 4 X = 2.190). Without adequate structure, it is difficult for student teaching experiences to achieve their intended outcomes. This weak congruencies found between the content of the handbooks in this study and these CEC standards provide little assurance that the programs involved adequately meet the needs of their students.

On five of the standard, the handbooks were awarded mean scores high than 1, but lower than 2. Such scores are interpreted to meant that there is little or no congruence between these five standards and the content of the student teaching handbooks. These standards deal primarily with the objectives of a student teaching experience, the kinds of professionals involved in student teaching, and the supervision of student teachers. As in Standard 10, if a student teaching experience is going to achieve its intended outcomes, then those outcomes must be stated as clear and measurable objectives (Standard 2: x=1.810), and those objectives must reflect the best "recommended practices" (Standard 12: x=1.714). However, even with appropriated and clearly stated goals, the cooperating professionals involved in supervising student teachers must be model teachers whose practices are congruent with the knowledge and skills expected of the student teacher (Standard 3: x=1,000). Furthermore, in order to ensure the necessary match between objectives and professionals, there should also be specific and written criteria for the selection and retention of cooperating professionals in a student teacher program (Standard 15: x=1.524). Lastly, in order to support the work of cooperating teachers, university/college supervisors need to observe student teachers in their sites at least five times during the student teaching experience. Even if student teaching experiences have adequate structure, without excellent cooperating professionals, without clearly identified goals, without a match between the practices of cooperating teachers and program goals, and without adequate university/college supervision, the student teaching experience may equate to little more than a final institutional "rubber stamp" of approval. That little or no congruence was found between these five CEC standards and the contents of the handbooks in this study implies that there may be a good deal of confusion among the cooperating teachers, the university/college faculty, and the preservice students in these programs as to what the meaning ad purpose of student teaching might be. Such confusion works to compromise the quality of the resulting student outcomes.

Mean scores of above 0 but below 1, were awarded to the handbooks in this study on five of the CEC standards. Such scores are interpreted to mean that there is nearly a total absence of any content in the handbooks that might relate to the given standard. This group of standard deals primarily with the qualification of the professionals involved in student teaching experiences, the quality of student teaching placement sites, and the way in which student teachers are placed in sites. In order to ensure that student teachers receive adequate guidance and support, it is important that cooperating teachers be appropriately licensed and certified in special education (Standard 7: x=.952) and that university/college supervisors also be qualified and experienced in special education (Standard 8: x=.381). In some geographical areas and in some university/college programs it may be very difficult to provide appropriately qualified professionals to supervise the student teaching experience. However, failure to provide such professionals works to weaken the efficacy of the student teaching experience. If the transfer value of the knowledge and skills acquired in student teaching is to be maximized then the student teaching experience must be in the same type of setting as that for which the student teacher is seeking licensure (Standard 5: m=.1429)). Such an assignment of professional responsibility to special education faculty works to ensure that the student teaching experience conforms to Standards 5 and 6. That there was nearly a total absence of any content in the handbooks that might relate to this group of five standards, is a critical weakness in each of the handbooks. Absent procedures to ensure the assignment of special

education students to appropriate sties and to ensure the involvement of appropriate professionals, it becomes very difficult for preparation programs to create and maintain high quality student teaching experiences.

With that changes that have been sweeping through special education, and with the emergence of new standards for special educators within their own professional association, the roles of special educators are changing (CEC, 1996; Stainback, & Stainback, 1992). With the growing trend toward including more and more students with disabilities in the general education setting, the ability of special educators and general classroom educators to collaborate and cooperate with each other in a team approach have become skills important to the success of all educators (Fischette, Maloy, & Heffley, 1989; Gable, 1993; Wigle & Wilcox, 1996). These developments place ever more demands upon teacher preparation programs to make sure that their graduates can meet the new expectations which they will face as special educators in K-12 school.

Given the importance of the student teaching experience in the preparation of preservice special educators, this experience must be structured very carefully (Williams, 1997). The student teaching handbook, used by the student teacher and the K-12 cooperating teacher, provides the structure for this capstone experience (French, 1991). Because of the importance of this experience to the overall development of preservice professionals, it must be of such quality as that indicated by CEC standards. As demonstrated by the results of this study, when the student teaching handbook does not provide adequate structure for the student teaching experience, the quality of that experience may very well be impacted in a significantly negative manner.

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Appendix A

CEC Standards for Clinical Experiences

1. Experiences are sequential in difficulty.
2. Each experience has clearly (A) stated objects, (B) measurable objectives that relate to the overall goals and objectives of the program.
3. Experiences involve model professionals who use practices congruent with the knowledge and skills expected of the student candidate.
4. Cooperating professionals are provided guidelines that structure filed experiences.
5. The student teaching experience is in the same type of settings as that for which the student candidate is seeking licensure/certification.
6. The student teaching experience is with the same type of individuals as those with whom the candidate is preparing to work.
7. Candidates are placed only with cooperating professionals who are appropriately licensed/certified in the specialization in which candidates are seeking certification.
8. Each area of specialization provides supervision to candidates by university/college faculty qualified and experienced in teaching in the area of specialization.
9. During student teaching, the supervisor from the university/college observes the candidate at least five (5) times.
10. Explicit performance criteria are established for student teaching and each filed experience.
11. Students have a minimum of 10 full-time weeks of supervised students teaching in the areas of specialization for which the candidate is being prepared.
12. Knowledge and skills required for each practicum experience reflect "recommended practices."
13. Practicum experiences are supervised under a structured program of advisement.
14. The special education faculty has responsibility for assigning candidates to approved placement. This responsibility includes the approval of cooperating teachers and supervisors.
15. There are written criteria for the selection and retention of cooperating professionals and supervisors.

Appendix B

Demographic Information---Special Education Program

Is your undergraduate special education program CEC accredited? _____ Yes _____No

How many undergraduate special education majors, on average, does your school have per year? _____.

How many undergraduate special education majors, on average, does your school graduate each year? _____.

Place a "x" on the correct line:

Does your school offer a _____single major, or a _____double major? If the problem is a double major, what are the combinations?

_____ _____

_____ _____

Is your special education program categorical? _____Yes _____No

If your special education program is categorical, please identify the categories included:

_____ _____

_____ _____

Is your program noncategorical? _____Yes _____No

If your special education program is noncategorical, please identify the types of disabilities this certification includes:

_____ _____

_____ _____

Who supervises the student teaching experiences in special education for your institution?

_____ Professors in the program _____ Adjunct staff

_____ Graduate interns _____ Others (Describe)

Comments: